



The Landscape for **Linguists** in **2026**

CIOL Conference

Programme: CIOL Conference





Introductions



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What we will cover:

- **CIOL Strategy Day 2026**
- **CIOL's & ELIS's surveys**
- **Linguist's Voices**
- **Delegate polls**



CIOL Strategy Day January 2026



A clear picture is emerging:

- The context (especially in the UK) is changing rapidly, particularly due to **AI** and shifts in **demographics** and **educational/qualifications** pipelines.
- The **skills** and **identities** of some **linguists** are **broadening** - extending beyond translation/interpreting into cultural mediation, marketing, technological, project management and advisory roles.



CIOL **Strategy Day** January 2026



AI & Machine Translation

- AI progress in the past year has been **significantly faster** than expected, including in non-European languages (e.g., Arabic, Chinese).
- Members see both **threats** (work displacement, client misconceptions, falling rates, devalued expertise) and some **opportunities** (efficiency, enhanced research, language governance roles).
- The common ground: human **judgement**, **cultural understanding** and **quality checks** remain essential, especially in legal, creative, public-service and diplomatic contexts.
- The long-standing public message that AI performs poorly in “non-European languages” is probably **no longer accurate** for a growing number of world languages.



CIOL Strategy Day January 2026



Education

- **Declining** school and university numbers continue to threaten the supply of 'home grown' UK linguists.
- As we know, some university language departments are **closing**; and translation as a taught HE specialism is changing.
- Elsewhere in the world (particularly in multilingual regions), **uptake** for languages (especially English) **is stronger**; the UK and Anglosphere are outliers.
- Universities are now widely teaching self-aware and critical '**AI literacy**' and, increasingly, actively expect students to use AI.



CIOL **Strategy Day** January 2026



Growing roles for linguists include:

- Cultural advisory and intercultural strategy
- Language governance and risk management
- Localisation and UX (User Experience)
- More general writing/editing and content creation
- Coaching/training/tutoring
- Terminology work
- Language-based project management

The profession's identity is broadening - including within Business, Professions and Government.

ELIS 2026 Results & Report

ELIS 2026
EUROPEAN LANGUAGE
INDUSTRY SURVEY



*“The role of language professionals and language companies is **gradually shifting from pure production to a broader spectrum of language-related services**. The industry is actively responding to these changes, but ELIS 2026 also **charts widespread concerns**.”*

*“Many are integrating **AI and language technologies** into their workflows, developing **complementary services**, or repositioning themselves towards **specialised sectors**, higher-value communication tasks, or **consultancy** roles. However, as with any structural shift in a mature industry, the **transition is uneven** and progressing at different speeds across the market.”*

*“**Market challenges and rapid development of the industry impact all**, from independent professionals to LSPs, from students to academic institutions, and from institutional buyers to language departments.”*

ELIS 2026 – What to do?

ELIS 2026
EUROPEAN LANGUAGE
INDUSTRY SURVEY



In the **ELIS results** for freelancers, respondents reported **coming to terms** with the new realities with **adaptation** and **resilience**.

The mitigations ELIS panellists discussed included:

- upskilling on **AI**
- seeking **direct clients**,
- **specialising** in higher quality/value niches and
- **diversifying** into a broader range of language, editing, marketing and localisation services

And also marketing our **core skills** as **linguists**...

Linguist's **Voices**

One of the actions from CIOL's Strategy Day in January was to bring to life more ***"Linguists' Voices"***

- Builds on work by **Steve Doswell** when he started as CIOL Chair
- Human scale stories of the **changing work of linguists**, which bring to life and help build understanding of the importance of linguists
- Includes **case studies** from Council Members, CIOL members and other stakeholders to honestly describe how languages work is changing - for the better, and for the worse.

"Linguists' Voices" is a platform to explain and showcase the value of linguists, to explain how language professionals **mitigate risk** and **create new opportunities** and also to describe new and emerging career pathways.

As a case-study driven resource, we envisage it supporting **employer/client-facing engagement** as well as providing **support to linguists** themselves.



Linguist's **Voices**



‘Translation Industry Linguist’ – Technological change is not new, but the pace is now much faster.

For translators and interpreters, the idea of combining linguistic expertise with the use of technology is really nothing new. We were one of the first sectors to use AI.”

“What has most definitely changed is the speed of development – and to me, this is the biggest shift.”

“As a language specialist (as I identify myself today) the conversation isn’t and shouldn’t be about AI or human.”

“It’s about us as a profession and an industry to collectively transform ourselves – to combine high-level linguistic and cultural expertise with a high-level of technological skill.”



Linguist's **Voices**

‘Content/Marketing Translator’ – It’s becoming a risk management job; brand and reputation are fragile across markets.

“Industry is increasingly understanding that AI generates content that creates new risks; not just efficiencies.”

“We know that AI errors are harder to detect, especially to someone who is not a language professional. And that meaning can drift across languages.”

“Language professionals are seen by industry - and will increasingly be seen - as the ones who identify and mitigate these risks.”

“Ours becomes a risk management job. Brand and reputation are fragile across markets. The message that is technically correct but culturally wrong can make or break a brand.”

Linguist's **Voices**



And we need to hear, share and respect the views of those Translators who prefer not to use AI...

“Thank you, but I’ll stick to resistance.”

“Responsible use of AI in translation means do not use it.”

Not using AI does wonders for environmental impact, copyright considerations, privacy and confidentiality, as well as the quality of your work. This method has been 100% tested and approved by myself and every translators who does not use AI.”

And we need to continue to highlight that for the spoken word and interpreting - especially in **PSI and high stakes contexts** – all the evidence shows AI is a long way from being ready to deploy or reliable.



Linguist's **Voices**

‘University Linguist’ – Our graduates have moved into roles at the intersection of languages, of cultures, of humans and technology

“It’s an exciting time for research and for current translation graduates.”

“For our current graduates, the role of language professionals is gradually shifting from pure production to a broader spectrum of language-related services.”

“Our graduates have moved into roles at the intersection of languages, of cultures, of humans and technology - and with increasing concerns about ethics.”

“The importance of ethics in trying to foster students’ ability to exercise their ethical agency, to recognise decisions as ethical decisions and think about what the repercussions of those might be, is really important.”



Linguist's **Voices**



‘Business Linguist’ - Languages are a lens on life, vital for today's and tomorrow's world of work.

“When I started studying languages, I thought I was choosing a profession - which was translation.”

I didn't realise that actually, I chose a lens through which I was going to build my entire career.”

“The future is bright for linguists, it's about ensuring that we stay strong and consistent in how we show up with our language skills.”

“And ensuring that that an educational background in languages is a positive lens through which we see the careers and the jobs of tomorrow.”



Your *Voices?*

Conference delegates polls



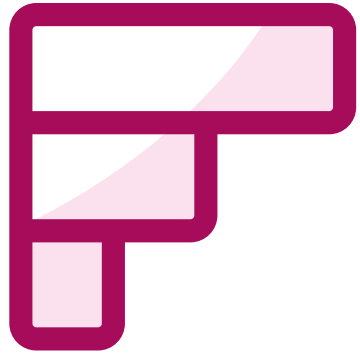
Join at
slido.com
#4256 811



1. Has AI changed your work in the last 12 months?

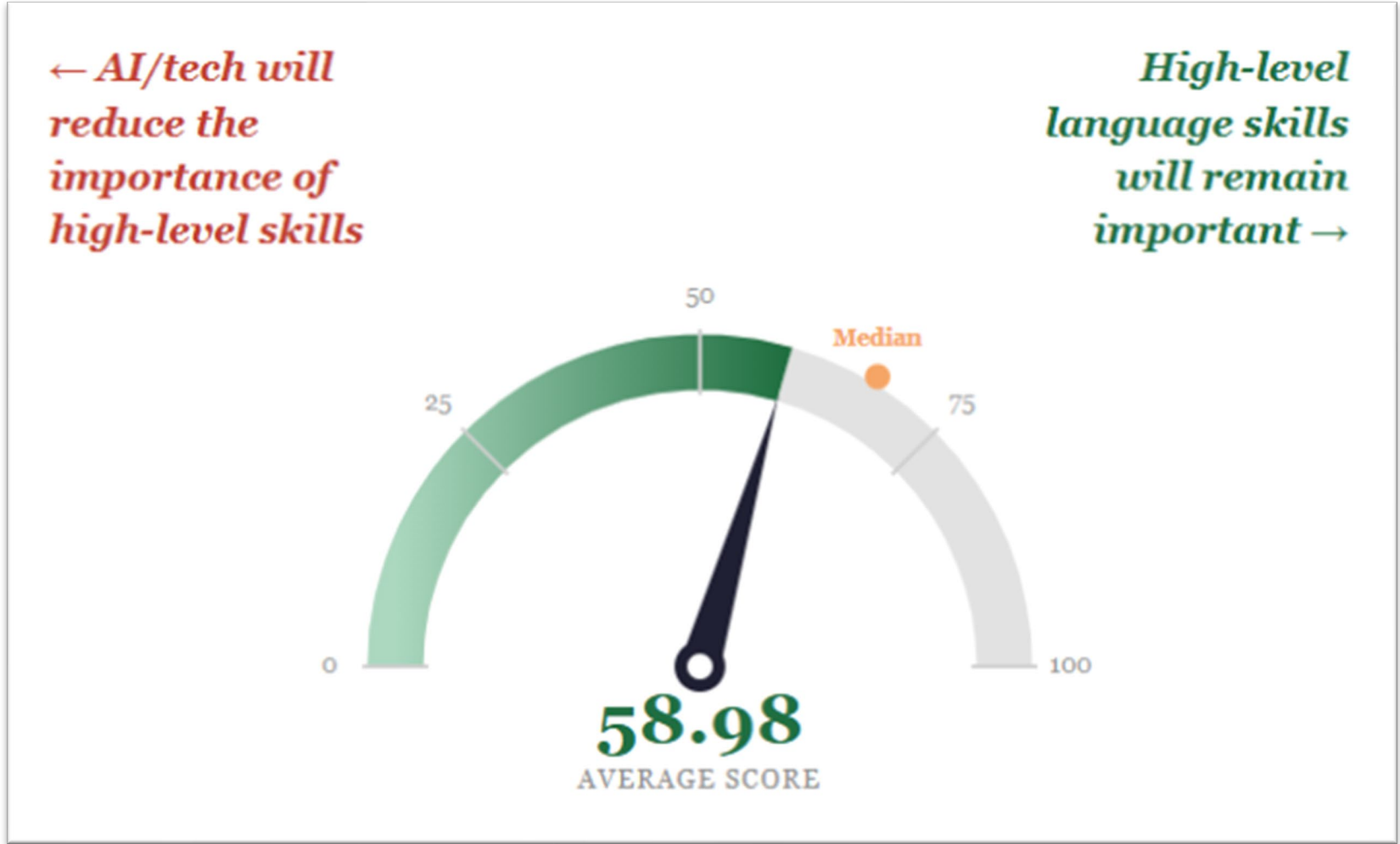


2. How are you feeling about the next 12 months for yourself as a linguist?



3. Do you think high level language skills will continue to be important for working life in the next 5-10 years?

Results from Member Poll 2026





Thank *you!*

The shape of **today**

There are two streams throughout the day

We have time at breaks and lunch for you to meet, mingle, discuss and reflect

...And we finish with a panel which will help everything bring together

So, let's get started!



	Main Auditorium	Lecture Theatre 1
10:40 – 11:20	Multi-skilled, Multilingual, Multi-modal: Can the modern linguist really do it all? Andrew Simpson	Technology Integration: From challenge to competitive advantage Vasiliki Kouli Prestidge



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